



U.S. EMBASSY - BAGHDAD

2008 Provincial Reconstruction Team News

-Northern Iraqi Women Gather to Discuss Nation's Future-

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Erbil, Iraq - More than 250 Iraqi women from all walks of life recently gathered in this northern city to discuss the “Future of Iraq” speaking via a teleconference with the wife of Major General Mark Hertling, commander of Multinational Division – North (MND-N). The Division was a sponsor of the event along with Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) operating in the region.



Women leaders from seven provinces at the “Professor Saad Conference Center” in Erbil, capital of the Kurdistan region of Iraq.

The modern Professor Saad Conference Center was the venue for the one-day meeting of women who came from all seven of the Northern provinces: Ninewa, Dahuk, Erbil, Kirkuk, Sulaymaniyah, Salah ad Din and Diyala. Women experts and participants discussed a wide range of topics including: Job Opportunities, Education, Health, and Women’s Rights.

The conference was a collaborative effort between MND-N and the PRTs that operate in the Northern provinces. The Salah ad Din PRT was a founding member of Task Force Iron’s Women’s Initiatives Working Group, which planned the conference. The PRTs coordinated the participation of women in their respective provinces and supported their attendance at the conference.

The women took the opportunity to come together, network and share their concerns with their provincial and national leadership. Iraqi Acting Minister of State of Women’s Affairs and Minister of Environment, Ms. Narmin Othman, was present from Baghdad and promised to take participants’ comments back to her colleagues in the central government.

Many women Provincial Council members from Kirkuk, Ninewa and Salah ad Din were present, as well as Governor Hamad Hamood Shekti of Salah ad Din. The Governor’s of Kirkuk and Ninaweh sent personal representatives to the conference.

A special guest, Mrs. Sue Hertling, the wife of the Commanding General of MND-N, Major General Mark Hertling, joined the conference from Germany via video tele-conference.

Mrs. Hertling welcomed the women saying “Although I cannot speak to the hardships you experience every day in Iraq, I believe I can speak [generally] for the strength of women, to their courage and tenacity and to the powerful roles women can play in overcoming adversity.”

She added that women around the world supported the Iraqi’s efforts because they were all striving for the same goal: “a peaceful world.”

Repeatedly stressed throughout the day were the challenges that women face finding sustainable and rewarding employment. One participant commented to applause that “We talk about women as seamstresses or hairdressers; but what about women as economists or owners of media outlets?”

Governor Hamad remarked “Women are an important part, she is half of the community and we want her to be educated. We will work on developing the woman. We want them to be the ones who make decisions and to be employed in different fields, the PC [Provincial Council] and to take part in the elections.”

These sentiments were echoed by the participants, many of whom advocated increasing the constitutional guarantee of twenty-five percent seats in the Iraqi Council of Representatives (COR) to forty percent.

Women’s initiatives are at various stages in each of the Northern provinces and one of the goals of the conference was to galvanize the women to be more active on pushing social issues in their communities and provinces.

The PRT in Kirkuk, which has more rapid progress on women’s initiatives, and the PRT in Salah ad Din recently engaged the leading women of Tikrit to help in the establishment a new NGO “Women Without Borders.” The organization is designed to promote greater women’s participation in business and politics.

The participants from Diyala took note of their efforts and left the conference enthusiastic and determined to fight for greater women’s rights in their province.

Layla Amthel Noorie, who runs an NGO in Ninaweh, said she believed the conference was a success because it included the voices of women from seven provinces who were unified in their motivation “to take our rights not just request them. We say yes to Iraqi women and no to anything that [hinders] women,” she declared.

The PRTs (Provincial Reconstruction Team) are a Department of State-led civilian-military initiative that helps provincial and local governments build capacity to serve their citizens through a range of governance and economic development programs. There are a total of twenty nine teams throughout Iraq manned by over four-hundred civilian volunteers and an equal number of military personnel.